



Testimony of Maury Johnson

AARP Connecticut

S.B. 1093, An Act Providing Funds for Municipal Matching Grants for Demand-Responsive Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities
Transportation Committee

March 11, 2009

Good Morning, Chairman DeFronzo, Chairman Guerrero, ranking members Boucher and Scribner, and members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Maury Johnson and I live in Stratford, CT. I am here today as a representative of AARP to support S.B. 1093, An Act Providing Funds For Municipal Matching Grants for Demand-Responsive Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities. AARP is a nonprofit, non-partisan membership organization for people age 50 and over. We have more than 40 million members nationwide and over 629,000 in Connecticut.

Transportation remains a high priority for AARP this year because mobility options are essential for seniors to remain independent and active as they age. Public transportation is not readily available to all residents in Connecticut, especially residents in less dense suburban and rural areas. According to a recent AARP survey, 60% of seniors said no public transportation was available within 10-minute walking distance of their home.

The lack of transportation options often leaves older adults and people with disabilities stranded. They lose their independence and are unable to work, get to medical appointments, go shopping, and attend social events and religious activities. Prolonged social isolation can lead to depression, obesity and illness that may involve expensive Title 19 institutional care. Ultimately, Medicare and Medicaid bear a substantial portion of these costs.

To help expand local transportation, AARP with the help of many members of this committee, advocated for funding of the municipal matching grant program for demand

responsive transportation that was enacted in 1999, but left dormant for over 6 years without funding. In 2005, the General Assembly funded that program with a 2-year \$10 million dollar funding mechanism and continued the funding for last biennium.

Under the program the state grants are matched with local funds to provide demand responsive transportation services, known as Dial-A-Ride in many communities. Since 2005, the program has enabled more than 140 towns and municipalities to expand needed transportation for seniors and people with disabilities. Without these services, many seniors and people with disabilities who are unable to drive will not be able to buy groceries, attend doctor's appointments or run other important errands. S.B. 1093 would extend funding for the municipal matching grant program.

The municipal matching grant program also allows seniors to quit driving without forcing them to give up the things they love. In Connecticut there are 601,844 people age 60 and older and surveys indicate that one in five of those residents no longer drive. AARP research has shown that over half of the non-drivers over age 65 stay home on any given day. The reasons for this include their declining health, their physical limitations, and their concern over driving safely – they don't want to hurt someone – and that they have no access to transportation.

The Surface Transportation Policy Project provided some statistics about this problem. Compared with older drivers, older non-drivers in the United States make:

- 15% fewer trips to the doctor
- 59% fewer shopping trips and visits to restaurants, and
- 65% fewer trips for social visits.

These older non-drivers are dependent on others, who may or may not be available. Just think, if you had to give up your own car and couldn't drive for a couple of weeks—what would you do? How would you get around? The municipal matching grant program allows towns to expand their demand responsive transportation and keep seniors active in the community. S.B. 1093 would continue the state funding for the municipal matching

grant program. Without state funding, seniors will not only lose the \$5 million per year in state dollars, but would likely lose the \$5 million in municipal funding that towns put up as a match. Ultimately, this means far fewer rides for seniors.

The municipal matching grant program for demand responsive transportation has been one of the most successful senior transportation programs in state history. Please renew the funding for this vital program. Please support S.B. 1093!

